

It follows that Edmond de Goncourt's estimate of Zola's democratic tendencies was arrant nonsense. Paris had been the young writer's home for several years now; he knew what to think of the Empire, and was against, not with, it. However, he placed literature before politics, particularly as all he saw of the political *cuisine* of the times inclined him to regard many professional politicians with contempt. And his Republicanism was not so intense as to restrict him exclusively to Republican society. He admired the Goncourts and Elaubert — to whom the former introduced him in 1869 — as literary masters, and associated with them freely. Again, he saw no reason why he should not contribute stories to "L'Artiste" and "L'Illustration," even if their editors did not think politically as he did. With respect to "Le Rappel," though his contributions were at times political they more frequently dealt with literary subjects; and the independence of his character was illustrated by the boldness with which he praised Balzac in a journal patronised and in some degree financed by Victor Hugo, who held that Balzac was fated to early and absolute oblivion, because he could not even write Trench. The result of Zola's championship of Balzac in "Le Rappel" was the severance of his connection with

that journal.  
This, however, did not take place till the last  
months of  
the Empire, when much of the paper's purpose  
was already  
accomplished.

In the summer of 1869, after signing his  
contract with  
Lacroix for the first Rougon-Macquart  
volumes, Zola felt  
that he might at last venture to marry, and in  
July Made-  
moiselle Mesley, to whom reference has been  
made already,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 100.